

Jasmina Cibic

Movements



Movements is a tool designed by DHC/ART Education to encourage in-depth explorations of key concepts evoked by the works presented in *Jasmina Cibic: Everything That You Desire and Nothing That You Fear*. By highlighting these points of conceptual departure through the document *Movements*, **DHC/ART** educators intend to inspire dialogue about the exhibition and encourage visitors to elaborate on the proposed themes through their personal interpretations and reflections. Over time, these *migratory concepts* are subsequently enriched as they inform new contributions to our evolving conversations about art.

Movements also serves as a reminder that an aesthetic experience engages the body—its senses and its movements—as much as the intellect. The body’s physical, emotional, and perceptive gestures are intimately linked as we move through the exhibition space and our senses are awakened. The rhythm of our trajectories and changing perspectives also mobilizes our vision; images take shape as our memory and imagination are touched by the emerging aesthetic landscape. *Movements* is thus an invitation for the visitor to become immersed, mind and body, in **DHC/ART** exhibitions, thereby developing a rich and dynamic understanding of the works.

Context: *Soft Power*



Jasmina Cibic, *Nada: Act I* (production still), 2016.

The 1958 Brussels Expo was significant for it was the first of its kind to happen after World War II, allowing enough time for countries to prepare. There was a wave of optimism around the Expo, which was soon overshadowed by a new global Cold War paradigm, with the large pavilions of the United States and the Soviet Union dominating the central plaza.¹ Given the importance of international exhibitions in the staging of power and the (re)shaping of national identity, governments were particularly vigilant about the art and architecture they chose to represent their states.

The notion of *soft power* is central to Jasmina Cibic's work. It refers to the ability of a country to co-opt and persuade by being attractive, instead of coercing through military or economic strength (*hard power*). Soft power relies on intangible resources, such as ideas, culture, and institutions, to influence behaviour and create a positive image on a global scale. Culture, one of soft power's key assets, works indirectly in influencing the environment for policy making,² and through her films and immersive installations, Cibic shows how it is and has been used to display national ideologies.

The *Nada* trilogy focuses on the role of *starchitects*³ chosen to represent national authority and their relation to state commissions. As Cibic puts it: "All the architecture I reference was built within a time when finding a new visual expression for the future was central to the European political debate."⁴ In *Nada: Act I*, Jasmina Cibic recreates the original architectural model

of the 1958 Yugoslav pavilion designed by Vjenceslav Richter. Politically active in leftist circles, architect, artist, interior designer, theorist, and activist, Richter was influenced by Constructivism⁵ and the Bauhaus,⁶ and believed that art and architecture were instruments of social and political change.⁷ His original project bore an enormous central mast from which the entire building was to be suspended. Its evocation of other Constructivist suspended structures did not go unnoticed by conservative politicians.⁸ Finally, the mast was decapitated. The amount of negotiation that went into the preparation, building, and reception of the Pavilion is encompassed in 27 boxes of documents that can be found at the Archive of Yugoslavia in Belgrade.

In Cibic's video, we see violinist Dejana Sekulić carefully attaching the wires to the central mast of the sculpture and turning it into a music instrument. She slowly tunes it and attempts to play Béla Bartók's *The Miraculous Mandarin*, the pantomime ballet chosen for the Yugoslav pavilion's "National day." We follow a series of close-ups and slow pans until the entirety of the original model is revealed. In a seductive visual language akin to that of soft power, Cibic presents us with a spectacle and its backdrop: the state commission along with the state intervention; the (almost literal) instrumentalization of architecture in the service of the state.

In Nada II, Cibic refers to The Miraculous Mandarin (1918—24), a pantomime ballet where three pimps employ a prostitute to lure men into a room and rob them. The Mandarin, one of these men, is deemed miraculous because of his ability to endure beating, suffocation and a stabbing without dying or giving up his lust for the woman. When they finally embrace, the Mandarin dies in her arms. Cibic re-imagines and re-stages the ballet, based on scant photographs from a performance at the 1958 Yugoslavia pavilion. She recasts Bartók's prostitute, pimps, and the Mandarin as Mother Nation, her politicians, and the Architect. How does soft power play out in this film?

Museums and art galleries are also sites where soft power is displayed, both through their architecture and the content of their collections, exhibitions, and the histories they tell. Cibic's installation at 451 St-Jean evokes a collector's home. What are your thoughts on this transformation?

¹ KULIĆ, Vladimir (2012). "An Avant-Garde Architecture for an Avant-Garde Socialism: Yugoslavia at EXPO '58". *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 47, no. 1, pp. 161-184.

² HOOGWAERTS, Leanne (2016). "Museums, exchanges, and their contribution to Joseph Nye's concept of 'soft power'". *Museum & Society*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 313-322.

³ Starchitect is a portmanteau of "star" and "architect" referring to architects who have attained a certain level of notoriety.

⁴ BAUDIN, Katia (2018) "Jasmina Cibic NADA. The Spirit of our Needs". *Kunstmuseen Krefeld, Museum Haus Esters*. Bielefeld/Berlin: Kerber, pp. 19-23.

⁵ Definition according to MoMA: "Developed by the Russian avant-garde at the time of the October Revolution of 1917. Declaring that a post-Revolutionary society demanded a radically new artistic language, Constructivist artists, led by Aleksandr Rodchenko, aimed to strip their works of subjective emotional character, eventually even rejecting painting as an individualist bourgeois form. The Constructivist artist was recast as an engineer of a new society, whose practice served a greater social or utilitarian purpose". <https://www.moma.org/collection/terms/26>

⁶ Definition according to MoMA: "The school of art and design founded in Germany by Walter Gropius in 1919, and shut down by the Nazis in 1933. The faculty brought together artists, architects, and designers, and developed an experimental pedagogy that focused on materials and functions rather than traditional art school methodologies. In its successive incarnations in Weimar, Dessau, and Berlin, it became the site of influential conversations about the role of modern art and design in society". <https://www.moma.org/collection/terms/12>

⁷ KULIĆ, Vladimir (2012). *Op. cit.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

Composition: *Fragmentation*



Jasmina Cibic, *Tear Down and Rebuild* (still), 2015.

“Collage is the twentieth century’s greatest innovation.”¹ “[It] is the noble conquest of the irrational, the coupling of two realities, irreconcilable in appearance, upon a plane which apparently does not suit them.”² “There’s this chance thing that happens [with collage]—you don’t always control things. Why did you find this today and not this? But you’ve got this thing, and you make it work. It’s the way life is, I suppose. Whatever happens, you deal with it.”³

A Pragmatist, a Conservationist, a Nation Builder, and an Artist/Architect walk into a room. The architecture demands attention and immediately foreshadows an intense, veiled, and sinister ambience. The four characters, female allegories of contradicting belief systems linked to state architecture, voice the words of (predominantly) male politicians from various speeches throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Like all-female productions of Shakespeare plays to counter the practice of boys playing female roles until the 1660s,⁴ this is, to a certain extent, a feminist re-visioning of history. The scripts are the same; the delivery, manipulated. When taken out of context, decorticated, and mixed with other ideas, the meaning of these speeches—and the intention of their speakers—becomes open to multiple interpretations. What do we think we know? Whom do we think we support, and what do we think we believe?

Jasmina Cibic forces us to face these uncomfortable questions with *Tear Down and Rebuild* (2015). Fragmented bits and pieces of script are woven together, like threads forming a tapestry. Figures such as Adolf Hitler, Margaret Thatcher, and Frank Lloyd Wright rub elbows or throw daggers at each other, in an outpouring of rhetoric at its best (or, rather, at its worst?). There is no

conversation, just an amalgamation of thoughts, pieced together in a manner that is directed, but confused—a four-way monologue by self-centered allegories, determined in their appropriated words.

Cibic’s work is based on multiple realities from different time periods and political regimes. Even though the quotes are all historical, the final product is a work of fiction: this points to the fact that the whole truth in history is rare to come by. We must usually contend with one account, from one perspective.⁵ Interestingly, in the creative realm, having access to only “part of the story” can work really well. Cibic’s work can be seen as a spoken counterpart to Christian Marclay’s video mash-ups: Marclay’s *The Clock* (2010), in which every hour of a 24-hour period is depicted in real time from clocks in various films, was so well edited that critic Daniel Zalewski claims Marclay “exposed the fakery of editing;”⁶ Cibic’s *Tear Down and Rebuild* seduces the viewer into considering a dialogue that is so well assembled, it exposes the fakery of rhetoric. It is a war of words, one slogan following another, as if the four parties involved can only hear themselves. It is a collage.

Choose a subject linked to the exhibition (politics, art, architecture, feminism, and so forth, and put Cibic’s strategy to the test: write one paragraph made up of a combination of quotations from various parties. What did you learn from this exercise?

Christian Marclay and Jasmina Cibic are two among many artists in the contemporary scene who use collage and fragmentation in their work. Think of a few more artists who employ the techniques of collage with different media (magazines, sound, photography, dance and so forth,) and compare their work to Cibic’s.

¹ Robert Motherwell

² Max Ernst

³ Christian Marclay quoted in ZALEWSKI, Daniel (2012). “The Hours: How Christian Marclay created the ultimate digital mosaic”. *The New Yorker*, March 12 edition. Online. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/03/12/the-hours-daniel-zalewski>. Consulted September 19, 2018.

⁴ MCMANUS, Clare (2016). “Shakespeare and Gender: the ‘Woman Part’”. *British Library Newsletter*, March 15 edition. Online. <https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/shakespeare-and-gender-the-womans-part>. Consulted September 19, 2018.

⁵ One has only to think of the “classical” narrative of art history that ignores the contribution of women, Indigenous, non-white or gender-non-conforming artists. These narratives are incomplete fragments recited from a single perspective. To give but one example, the so-called Bible of Art History, Janson’s *History of Art*, did not include a single woman in its pages until 1986. The absence of women in these classical narratives has been addressed by feminist art historians such as Linda Nochlin since the 1970s.

⁶ ZALEWSKI, Daniel (2012). “The Hours: How Christian Marclay created the ultimate digital mosaic”. *The New Yorker*, March 12 edition. Online. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/03/12/the-hours-daniel-zalewski>. Consulted September 19, 2018.

Content: *Interior*

Context

Different kind of walks can be performed within the exhibition Everything That You Desire and Nothing That You Fear, by Slovenian artist Jasmina Cibic. The following instructions offer you three: a walk that undulates alongside curtains, a dance-walk with diverse allegorical figures, and a walk that allows you to traverse a cinematic screen to carefully consider the architectural decor where a political debate is taking place.

Your wanderings will take place inside DHC/ART's main building, 451 St-Jean Street. You will need a notepad, a pen, and an exhibition plan. You will move through all four floors of the building, identified as G1, G2, G3, and G4.

Jasmina Cibic's exhibition at DHC/ART is a vast, immersive installation that explores the notion of "soft power", which is when a political regime uses strategies of seduction—rather than coercion—in order to impose a certain image of the nation. Art and architecture are prime instruments for soft power, which subtly infiltrates their walls, ceiling, furniture, and materiality and influences our bodily movements within these spaces. At DHC/ART, Cibic uses the case study of former Yugoslavia and focuses on its different pavilions presented at Universal Exhibitions during the twentieth century: at Barcelona (1929), Paris (1937), Brussels (1958), and Montreal (Expo 67).

While DHC/ART's satellite building at 465 St-Jean deals with state-sanctioned public architecture, the building at 451 St-Jean is re-imagined as the residential house of an unnamed collector, who has assembled imagined artefacts from the above four Yugoslav pavilions. Thus, Cibic allows us to investigate the myriad ways in which politics may dangerously permeate public architecture.

1. Walking, Undulating, Alongside Curtains

Architecture is never neutral: it 'does' something to our bodies, makes them move in certain ways, directs our gazes. Knowing this, let's focus first and foremost on the curtains. These are the main design motif of the entire building: they cover the inside walls of all four exhibition floors and transform the gallery into a boudoir-like space.

Instructions 1

Upon entering G1, direct your attention to the curtains, then walk slowly following their movement, observing the effect that they have on the other elements in the space. Now, walk up the stairs to the other floors, observing this same design element. Pause at the fourth floor, and watch the film State of Illusion. You will find the curtain motif in the film as well. At the end of your exploration, find a quiet spot to sit and think about two things that are happening on each of the four floors in relation to the curtains: these can be emotional, gestural, sonic, atmospheric, or visual elements, among others. Write them down on a few pages in your notepad, in a non-linear fashion, in a shape inspired by your walk.

2. Walking and Dancing with Mother Nation

Women's bodies are constantly instrumentalized in the soft-power goals of a nation, and take the shape of various allegories, all stemming from the Mother Nation. Female allegories populate throughout 451 St-Jean. As soon as you begin your walk in G1, you will encounter the central allegory of Mother Nation, titled *Land of Plenty*.

Instructions 2

Walk slowly around the *Land of Plenty* sculpture in G1. Observe the suggested gestures, posture, expression, clothes, what is in her arms. Reinterpret these with your body (or imagine yourself doing it). Afterward, do the same thing for the three figures that are suspended on the curtains. Then walk to the other floors: you will find other female figures circulating throughout the gallery spaces, or in the filmic spaces. Repeat the same exercise as in G1.

Use a few pages in your notepad and draw a continuous line that expresses your gestural explorations (imagined or performed) in relation to each figure. Each should have its own page, its own continuous line. Are there resemblances between the shapes? Differences?

3. Walking Across a Cinematic Screen and Exploring a Filmed Architecture

Instructions 3

Watch the film Tear Down and Rebuild in G2. This time, observe everything that is occurring aside from the language and the four protagonists: the interior of the ancient Palace of the Federation in Belgrade, the sculptures, and the tapestries located in the various spaces. At select moments during the film (or for its entire duration), put your hands over your ears and watch the film in silence. Afterward, draw the fragments of architecture, sculptures and 2D artworks that struck you or fascinated you in your notepad. Let these reflections rest for a while—you can come back to them later.

Conclusion

Now come back to the front desk in the lobby. Take an exhibition brochure, where you will find the essay written by DHC/ART's curator Cheryl Sim. We invite you to read it, and to think about it in dialogue with your somatic and tactile walked explorations.

Considerations: *Patriarchy*



Jasmina Cibic, *Nada: Act III* (still), 2017.

Some women's studies specialists understand patriarchy to be a threshold concept¹: once the notion is integrated, one becomes aware of the way in which it structures all of our social interactions. Allan G. Johnson determines that a "society is patriarchal to the degree that it is *male-dominated, male-identified and male-centered*" and "involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women".² bell hooks defines patriarchy as a form of "blind obedience," characterized by a "destruction of individual willpower" and a "repression of thinking whenever it departs from the authority figure's way of thinking."³

Patriarchy's insidious violence comes from its pernicious integration in all spheres of our lives. This does not mean that women in a patriarchal society are invisible or absent. Rather, women's lives are modulated by criteria, determined by men, that limit their agency. The female figure in Jasmina Cibic's oeuvre is informed by patriarchal pressures. The artist reveals the ways in which the female subject has been instrumentalized for political and aesthetic goals: think of the archetype of the Mother Nation, which relegates the responsibility of symbolizing the federative spirit of a country to women.

Cibic's work also demonstrates that architectural modernism⁴ is both the instrument and the symptom of the patriarchal force: generally conceived for and by the male subject, it transforms women into objects in these architectural spaces and erases their work.⁵ In some of Cibic's videos, we see palaces and city halls, sites where male power is determined and exerted. These spaces are re-imagined to make way for female gestures and voices that reassess political material to reveal its pre-constructed aspect.

While public architecture becomes a space where decisions are made between men, private architecture is conceived as an imposed box, a cage for women. Such is the case with the house Adolf Loos imagined for Josephine Baker, referenced by Cibic in one of her sculptures. At the centre of the house, Loos places a pool, around which pierced windows provide house guests with choice views of Baker bathing.⁶ Even in the most intimate corners of this house fantasized by Loos, Baker's body is submitted to a gaze, offered as a spectacle.

Try to locate another occurrence of the female figure in Cibic's works at the Foundation. How are these women presented? What do they have to say or do? What underlying critical discourses are generated from their appearances, gestures or speeches?

Patriarchy is a notion that affects all of us daily, but is hard to define succinctly. Attempt to describe what patriarchy means to you. How does it impact your everyday life? Exchange with your peers on the subject. Did you draw the same conclusions, or note similar examples?

¹ See HASSEL, Holly et. al. (2011). « Surfacing the Structures of Patriarchy: Teaching and Learning Threshold Concepts in Women's Studies ». *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, vol. 5, no. 2. Online. <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1303&context=ij-sotl>. Consulted September 26, 2018.

² JOHNSON, Allan G. (1997). *The Gender Knot: Unraveling our Patriarchal Legacy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p. 153.

³ hooks, bell (n.d.). *Understanding Patriarchy*. Online. <https://imagineborders.org/pdf/zines/UnderstandingPatriarchy.pdf>. Consulted September 26, 2018.

⁴ Modernist architecture emerges at the start of the 20th century and is characterized by a rejection "of all forms of the past, whether it be in the symmetry of compositions, in the use of ornaments borrowed from previous centuries or in the use of traditional building materials". For examples of modernist architecture, see DUBOIS, Martin (2008). « Modernisme architectural: Simplicité volontaire ». *Continuité*, no. 119, pp. 51-54. Online. <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/continue/2008-n119-continue1055693/17331ac.pdf>. Consulted September 26, 2018.

⁵ Many female architects, designers and artists who have partnered with men have seen their work rendered invisible, such as Lily Reich, close collaborator of Mies van der Rohe.

⁶ SLESSOR, Catherine (2018). « Loos and Baker: A House for Josephine ». *Architectural Review*. Online. <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/loos-and-baker-a-house-for-josephine/10028604.article>. Consulted September 26, 2018.



DHC/ART Foundation for Contemporary Art
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Gallery Hours

Wednesday to Friday from noon to 7:00 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

DHC/ART Education

Opening hours:
Tuesday to Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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